



The purpose of this report is to provide Members with developments around the future of the Coastal since the last Town Council Meeting.

No. DETAIL

1) ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE

- a) The resolution following the discussion in private session at the end of the Town Council meeting of 12 November included a formal decision to nominate the Coastal Centre for inclusion on the Isle of Wight Council's *List of Assets of Community Value*.
 - b) The nomination was submitted on Friday 30 November and is attached to this report for information.
 - c) The Isle of Wight Council's *Community Right to Bid* policy provides for notification of their acceptance or rejection of the nomination within eight weeks of its receipt.
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2) LETTER TO COUNTY COUNCILLORS

- a) The same resolution included the decision that: 'all 40 Members of the Isle of Wight Council be written to expressing this Council's concerns about the implications for local democracy of a decision significantly affecting Ventnor being made by just two Members.'
 - b) The letter, dated 19 November 2012 and signed by both Mayor and Deputy Mayor, was mailed that day and emailed to each of them the following day. Both included a copy of the draft Business Plan. A copy of the letter is attached to this report for information.
 - c) At the time of this report, positive support for Ventnor Town Council's proposals for the future of the Coastal Centre had been received from nine Members: Jonathan Bacon (Brading, St Helens & Bembridge), Rodney Downer (Godshill & Wroxall), Paul Fuller (Cowes West & Gurnard), Heather Humby (Sandown North), Geoff Lumley (Newport East), Ian Stevens (Ryde West), Ian Ward (Sandown South), Chris Welsford (Ventnor) and David Whittaker, Newport West).
 - d) Copies of the responses can be provided to Members on request.
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3) COUNCIL MEETING DISCUSSION

- a) County Councillor Chris Welsford directed a range of questions to Council Leader David Pugh at the full Council meeting of 28 November about his refusal to meet with Ventnor's Mayor to discuss the Town Council's proposals and his decision that the Coastal Centre should be sold as soon as possible.
 - b) An analysis of the Leader's answers to those questions is attached to this report for Members' information.
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4) OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- a) Members will recall that at the meeting the Mayor and Town Clerk had with the Isle of Wight Council's Chief Executive Steve Beynon and Deputy Director Economy and Environment John Metcalfe on 5 November, reference was made to the Isle of Wight Council's interest in developing the St Boniface site as a Community Hub for the Town.
 - b) This would include some of all of: the Library, the Youth Centre, the Town Council and the Enterprise Hub. Such a development is, apparently, what David Pugh has in mind when he refers to the Town Council being offered alternative premises.
 - c) There are three substantial reasons why this is unlikely to prove attractive to any of the Ventnor organisations they would like to see relocated there:
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- its edge-of-town location compared with the much more central Coastal Centre;
 - its size: at an estimated (by Strategic Manager Assets Barry Cooke) of 700sq metres it could not accommodate the proposed organisations and leave spaces for an Enterprise Hub;
 - its internal structures: there is no comparison between the Hall + Classroom internal spaces of the School and the 32 rooms of the Coastal Centre as far as fitness for purpose is concerned.
- d) On all counts, the Coastal Centre is by far the most suitable building for such a Community Hub. The lower ground floor, with its access for people with disabilities, would make an excellent home for the town's Library. Other services, such as NHS teams, Police, Town Council and bases for Youth Workers, Probation Service, Youth Offending Team etc could be accommodated as well as still providing significant accommodation for small business start-ups/office services.
- e) It is proposed that the Town Council supports ongoing discussions with the Isle of Wight Council - and any interested agencies – on the potential for such a development.
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VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL

NOMINATION FOR LISTING AS AN ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE

COASTAL CENTRE (AKA SALISBURY GARDENS)

28 NOVEMBER 2012

1) A DESCRIPTION OF THE NOMINATED LAND OR BUILDING INCLUDING ITS PROPOSED BOUNDARIES INCLUDING A LOCATION PLAN.

- a) The asset is the land and building locally known as Salisbury Gardens on the southern side and western end of Ventnor's Dudley Road.
- b) The Land Registry documentation, including the location plan, is attached with this nomination.

2) THE ADDRESS OF THE ASSET BEING NOMINATED INCLUDING POSTCODE

- a) The postal address is: The Coastal Centre, Dudley Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight
- b) Its postcode is P038 1EJ.

3) NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF THE EXISTING OCCUPANTS OF THE ASSET (IF RELEVANT) AND OF ALL THOSE HOLDING A FREEHOLD (OWNERSHIP) OR LEASHOLD INTEREST IN THE ASSET

- a) The current occupants of the building are the Coastal Management Team of the Isle of Wight Council and Ventnor Town Council, both using the address and postcode in 2) above.
- b) The freehold, according to the Land Registry documentation, was registered to the Isle of Wight Council on 27 November 2008.
- c) Ventnor Town Council has an interest in the asset based on the fact that the last transfer for value was the purchase by VUDC in 1945.

4) EVIDENCE THAT THE LOCAL GROUP MAKING THE NOMINATION IS ELIGIBLE TO DO SO UNDER THE TERMS OF THIS POLICY

As a Town Council this nominating body is eligible to make this nomination under the provisions of the Community Right to Bid.

5) A WRITTEN STATEMENT AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE ASSET IS OF COMMUNITY VALUE: PAST & PRESENT

- a) The building has been primarily used as the base for public services since its purchase by Ventnor Urban District Council in 1945. Initially by that Council until 1 April 1974 and then by South Wight Council until 1 April 1995, followed by the Isle of Wight Council until the present day.
 - b) The Isle of Wight Council opened the building in 1998 as the Isle of Wight Coastal Visitors Centre *to provide coastal learning opportunities for the local community and visitors to the Isle of Wight* with an education programme of 11 courses designed for levels of the national curriculum
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- c) The Isle of Wight Council secured a Heritage Lottery Grant in a total of £49,900 for a project to *focus on interpreting the physical, social and cultural history of the Isle of Wight coastline, its fragile nature and how residents and visitors can all help to enjoy, celebrate and preserve the heritage.*
 - d) Although the Visitor Centre became restricted to an appointment only basis from September 2010, its external signage continues to brand the building conspicuously as the Coastal Visitors Centre.
 - e) The building was used as the base for the Isle of Wight Council's Rights of Way Team from 2004-2012.
 - f) It also housed the voluntary organisation, the Isle of Wight Natural History Association from 2006-2011.
 - g) Ventnor Town Council has rented offices in the building February 2011.

6) A WRITTEN STATEMENT AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE ASSET IS OF COMMUNITY VALUE: FUTURE USE

- a) Ventnor Town Council has two prospective uses for the future development of the building providing ongoing and sustainable services for the local community.
- b) The first is the already fully developed proposal for the building to become an Enterprise Hub for business start-ups in the creative industries and other office based activities that has secured the positive support of all the major relevant partners:
 - o Job Centre Plus
 - o Chamber of Commerce
 - o Isle of Wight College
 - o Isle of Wight Council's Adult & Community Learning Service
 - o Chair of the Island's Employment & Skills Board.
- c) A copy of the Draft Business Plan for that development is enclosed with this.
- d) The second, following from a recent discussion with the Isle of Wight Council's Chief Executive and Deputy Director Economy and Tourism, would be based on a rehousing of several existing local services including:
 - o Ventnor Library
 - o Ventnor Youth Centre,
 - o NHS teams
 - o Police.
- e) The accommodation needs of these services would leave some rooms for the business start-up and office services development envisaged in the initial scheme.



VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL



Coastal Centre, Salisbury Gardens, Dudley Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1EJ

19 November 2012

Dear

We are writing to ask you to respond to the fact that Ventnor has been deprived of a new Business Enterprise Hub located in one of its iconic buildings and the probability of accessing £100k of external funding to restore and refit it by the decision of just two of your colleagues.

The building, currently the Coastal Centre in which the Town Council rents its offices from the Isle of Wight Council, has been listed for two years as surplus to requirements and the Town Council had formally registered its interest in acquiring it, in the context of the Localism Act, in May.

Stage 1 applications to both the Coastal Communities Fund (£70k) and Leader (30k) had been successful and final applications invited. We were close to making a major positive intervention in the economy of our town by providing attractive and supported office space for up to 20 business start-ups. The Business Plan underpinning the project is attached for your information.

The project has the explicit support of all the relevant Island partners: Job Centre Plus, Chamber of Commerce, Southern Housing Group, Isle of Wight College, the Adult & Community Learning Service and the Chair of the Island's Employment & Skills Committee. It is also a close fit with your Council's declared priorities.

Yet the Council Leader refused for a critical month to even meet with us to discuss the project and then simply declared that the building would be sold on the open market as soon as possible.

The building has served the town for over 140 years; it could offer new hope to at least some of the town's 300 16-24 year olds Job Centre Plus estimate to be unemployed and inject new life into a town where half its population live in the 22% most deprived areas in England and among the five most deprived on the Island.

It is our view that a decision of this significance for Ventnor is one in which all County Councillors should be involved if democracy is to be alive and well on the Island.

We are more than happy to discuss this with you further at any time.

Yours sincerely

Mayor

Deputy Mayor



MEMO

DATE: 1 DECEMBER 2012
FROM: DAVID
SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON Q&AS

- 1) This is an attempt to clarify at least some of the confusions around the Leader's responses to Chris's questions about the Coastal Centre at this week's full council meeting.
- 2) The four questions MQ28/12, MQ29/12, MQ30/12 & MQ31/12, as circulated by both Chris Matthews and Chris Welsford include two (different!) answers to the same question: MQ29/12 & MQ30/12.
- 3) So, taking them in turn:
- 4) MQ28/12
 - He ducks the core of the question: the refusal for almost a month to either offer a meeting or to say that he wouldn't meet.
 - He states now – though not then – that *the IW Council had a clearly stated decision on the future of this building*. The IW Council did not!! The building is included in the list of disposals for 2013/14 with the designation: *Service decision yet to be taken*.
 - The IW Council *does* have a policy for capital receipts disposals, but that also includes a specific provision for disposal at less than market value.
 - He states that he asked officers to make themselves available, but no meeting with them took place until 6 September with the funding deadline of 21 September.
 - He makes great play of the fact that funding applications had been placed before an approach to the IW Council had been made. He should be capable of understanding that unless there was some hope of the funding being available for the refurbishment work there was point in those discussions and, in any event, the IW Council was informed of VTC's interest in the building as early as 25 May.
 - The theme of criticising VTC for its allegedly inflexible insistence on *one* building runs throughout his responses and is absolutely disingenuous. He takes no account of the fact that for the scheme to be viable there has to be an identifiable and sustainable income stream and fitting the project into either of the other buildings to which he refers – alongside the Library and Youth Centre, that we were told was their plan – is simply impossible.
 - He asserts more than once that VTC was/is unwilling considered other buildings: that is absolutely not the case, as Steve and I told Steve Beynon and John Metcalfe at our meeting with them.
 - His final paragraph on the funding is despicable: he knew exactly the position with the funding: Stage 1 approvals for two funding streams, hardly *just an aspiration!*
- 5) MQ29/12 + MQ30/12
 - Here again *dogmatically insisting it is in one location (MQ30), inflexibly wedded to (MQ29)*. The fact is that there were – and remain – several solid reasons why the Coastal Centre was, and remains the ideal site: its attractive location adds significantly to the ability to attract new business to the town, its internal structures provide ideally sized rooms already in place, the internal cat5 wiring puts communications access immediately available to all the rooms and the result of facilitating access to the funding would have enabled the refurbishment of an iconic local building and its retention for public service in the town.

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- He talks frequently in these responses of the inflexibility of VTC's position while failing to acknowledge his own by repeatedly stating that our failure to contact them first is the cause of the problem, when a more flexible response would have been to welcome the potential availability of a significant sum of money and a clearly viable and well supported project capable of an effective contribution to the town's regeneration.

6) MQ31+/12

- Yet another reference to *the local authority's view* when in fact it's clearly at this stage it's *just his!*
- And still no explanation of why the sale of the building has been forward, not only from next year to this one but such as to require a nomination by 16 November.

7) Conclusions

- Questions at full council are not an effective mechanism for challenging decisions.
- The CP's representation of the exchange gives the impression that the fault lies with the victim!
- The Island's democratic deficit is clearly revealed when one man can make such a critical decision for the life of a town.
- VTC has received clear support from 20% of the Members, how will their voice be heard?